

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

CHANGE TO THE SERVICEMEMBERS' GROUP LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM On June 15, 2006, the President signed Public Law 109-233, the Veterans' Housing Opportunity and Benefits Improvement Act of 2006. This new law has resulted in a change affecting the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program.

Currently, service members who have SGLI coverage and are totally disabled when they separate from service can apply for an extension of their SGLI coverage for up to one year with no premium cost.

Public Law 109-233 extends the maximum free coverage period from one year to two years and is retroactive to one year prior to enactment. As a result of this change, the two-year SGLI disability extension is available to veterans who meet all of the following conditions: were discharged on or after June 15, 2005; had SGLI coverage at the time of separation; and have been totally disabled continuously since their date of separation from service.

To apply for this extension or to get more information, veterans should visit the VA Insurance web site at www.insurance.va.gov/sgliSite/SGLI/sglidisabled.htm. They can also contact the Office of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance toll-free at 1-800-419-1473.

VA NARROWS LIST OF SITES FOR FUTURE ORLANDO MEDICAL CENTER (VA News Release July 26, 2006) WASHINGTON – Orlando-area veterans are another step closer to a new state-of-the-art health care facility to be built by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Department has narrowed its list of potential locations for a new hospital and associated facilities to two area sites.

The two preferred sites, one at Lake Nona Boulevard within the city of Orlando, and the other at International Corporate Park on Bee Line Expressway, will now undergo environmental assessments before VA makes its final selection and negotiates to purchase the parcel. Once the final site is acquired, VA plans call for the construction of a 134-bed hospital, 118-bed nursing home, 60-bed domiciliary, an outpatient clinic and associated facilities.

VA narrowed the list to two sites after a comprehensive evaluation of six locations that were originally under consideration. Factors in the Department's evaluation of the sites included accessibility for veterans, physical characteristics of the parcels, and development of the surrounding areas that would complement a VA presence. A public hearing was also held in May on the site selection process, giving veterans and other stakeholders the opportunity to provide input.

VA LEADS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN CONTRACTING WITH DISABLED VETERANS (VA News Release July 27, 2006) WASHINGTON – Edging closer to its target for contracting with service-disabled, veteran-owned businesses, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has bested other federal agencies, according to a report on last year's federal contracting program. Of 18 federal agencies that procured at least \$1 billion through contracts, VA led in its percentage -- 2.15 percent -- awarded to small businesses run by veterans disabled during military service. VA awarded more than \$200 million to these veteran-owned businesses in fiscal year 2005.

VA's leadership role in supporting service-disabled, veteran-owned businesses was cited in the recent Small Business Goaling Report by the Small Business Administration. According to the report, VA's \$9.8 billion in total acquisitions last year made it the fourth largest purchaser of goods and services within the federal government, behind the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy and NASA.

Across the federal government, the report said contracts with service-disabled veterans increased to \$1.9 billion last year, up by 58 percent since 2004.

The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) was established in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to assist and support the interests of small business. This office is available only for the purpose of providing information, counseling, and guidance. OSDBU neither awards contracts nor maintains solicitation mailing lists. Their web site is <http://www.va.gov/osdbu/>

CLOTHING ALLOWANCE PAYMENTS Clothing allowance may be paid to a veteran who has a service connected disability or a disability that requires he or she wear or use a prosthetic or orthopedic device that wears out or tears clothing. A service-connected anatomical loss or loss or use of a hand or foot is presumed to require the use of a prosthetic or orthopedic device that wears out the clothing. The clothing allowance may also be paid if the veteran uses, for a service-connected skin condition, medication prescribed by a physician which causes irreparable damage to the veteran's outer garments. A skin condition requiring use of medication is not considered static, and a redetermination is required each year.

The application form for the clothing allowance is VA Form 10-8678 Application for Annual Clothing Allowance (Under 38 U.S.C. 362). This form may be downloaded from <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>, or a copy may be obtained by calling 1-800-827-1000. The form is also available from local County Veterans Service Offices (see the "County Government" listings in the telephone directory). However, any communication from a veteran describing the device or medication used and requesting payment of the clothing allowance is considered a claim for this benefit. **Annual clothing allowance claims should be sent to the VA Medical Center or Outpatient Clinic of jurisdiction, for the attention of the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service.**

To be eligible for the 2006 clothing allowance, the veteran must be found to meet the eligibility requirements on August 1, 2006. At the end of July computer-generated letter/applications are issued to veterans whose records are set to require annual redetermination of clothing allowance eligibility.

The 2006 clothing allowance payments for veterans who have been authorized recurring payments and for others whose awards are input on or before the last processing cycle of August will be issued on September 1. Payments for clothing allowance awards input after the last processing cycle of August will be issued in about seven to ten days after the award is authorized.

The 2006 clothing allowance is \$641.00. Veterans who are receiving their compensation payments by direct deposit will receive the clothing allowance payment by direct deposit. Veterans without direct deposit will receive their clothing allowance payments by check to the same address as their compensation checks. A veteran receiving retired pay is not required to waive any portion of his/her retired pay to receive the clothing allowance.

IMPORTANT DATES IN AUGUST

August 1 payments for July due

August 10 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 09-01-2006 payments

August 23 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 09-01-2006 payments

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) - CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) - PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 **1-888-244-6711**

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Forms: **www.va.gov/vaforms**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **www.warms.vba.va.gov**

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessioned homes): **www.ocwen.com**

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **www.floridavets.org**

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**